

Trauma Exposure, PTSD and Violence 2

Written Video Transcript

In beginning to do the studies that I'm going to talk about that we did, we have done in my lab there in Los Angeles, we needed a model or some models to guide our thinking about how it was that early [00:00.20.00] abuse can be related to current risk of violent behavior. So, we scrounged the literature. And this probably isn't an exhaustive list, but it's a fairly representative list of the different models, from a psychological perspective anyway, that are out there. So let me share with you what some of these [00:00.40.00] are about. From a psychodynamic perspective we have an insecure attachment model that has some appeal to it. Then we've got a choice of different models here from a social learning perspective, modeled aggression, coercive family interaction, cultural spillover. [00:01.00.00] A variation of that that's related but is more cognitive would be a social information processing model. Some trauma folks who really are expert in childhood abuse and its effects [1:16] and colleagues have what might be termed an emotional regulation model. [00:01.20.00] And then Bob [1:23] and I and our colleagues in this series of study we come from a slightly different perspective that might be thought of as an ecopathologic perspective. We're interested in examining environments and characteristics of environments that can actually make people sick. [00:01.40.00] That's as opposed to a psychopathology model that suggests that regardless of cause people wind up with mental illness. And then we're interested in the (correlates) of mental illness from a psychopathologic perspective. So, you can think of our model as being a more trauma-oriented model perhaps [00:02.00.00] than the others. But let's look at them in a little bit more detail 'cause I think these are not necessarily competing models so much as they're complimentary. You don't need to just pick one and ignore the others because I think you'll find that there are some advantages that each of the models bring. [00:02.20.00] From a psychodynamic perspective I think it's important for us to think about how important it is for attachment to be secure between the child's primary caregiver and the child in terms of the sense of emotional security, the sense of trust that develops, [00:02.40.00] a reasonable world view that develops, the belief that the world is fair, that adults who are in positions of responsibility are trustworthy and will take care of your needs. That's what's happening in terms of attachment, as children are learning whether their primary caretaker [00:03.00.00] can soothe them when things go wrong, puts their interests first and so on. So, it's pretty important I think to pay attention to how it is that children and latency age and adolescent age children actually get along with their parents, whether they respect their parents or not, [00:03.20.00] whether they believe that their parents have their best interests in mind, whether they feel that the parent is trustworthy and is someone who, when problems develop, that they can actually go to. Another perspective, and you're probably [00:03.40.00] familiar with this one, would be a social learning perspective. Why is it that children develop aggressive beliefs and engage in violent behavior with their peers? Well, they've learned that at home. They've been taught that. From a social learning perspective maybe parents



[00:04.00.00] are engaging in violence in the home and inadvertently are perpetuating that cycle of violence by teaching their children that this is the way to get your needs met. Another social learning perspective is represented by what might be termed [00:04.20.00] a cultural spillover theory, such that the child who receives harsh treatment at home or in the community then gets the idea that it's okay to do those kinds of things in the schoolroom or on the playground. [00:04.40.00] Cultural spillover. You're probably familiar or have heard about (Gerald Patterson's) work at the University of Oregon, the social learning perspective on—they've done a lot of very good work in intervention with violent families and at-risk families, [00:05.00.00] families where an adolescent has already been convicted of a crime. From a social learning perspective—this also embodies the family systems perspective because Patterson's intervention model would include intervening not only with the acting out child but also with the family environment, the parents [00:05.20.00] and siblings in that family who actually are responsible probably for perpetuating the cycle of violence. Dodge is a proponent of a social information processing perspective. And this is a little different because [00:05.40.00] it's more brainy, more of a cognitive perspective than it is a social learning perspective. (It) suggests that children that are exposed to physical aggression don't develop appropriate cognitive abilities for sorting threat versus non-threat stimulant [00:06.00.00] and may develop a bias because of the environments that they operate in toward identifying early identification of threat stimuli and maybe a degree of self-protection. If it's on the border, put it in the threat category and respond accordingly 'cause otherwise some really bad things can happen to you. [00:06.20.00] In the process of that what happens in terms of views of others is that there's probably that same bias that's taken into the beliefs about intentions of other people and how it's okay, under certain circumstances anyway, to use violence to get your needs met. [00:06.40.00] This one is a little more biologic in perspective. It's represented by [6:51] and colleagues. The notion here is that affect—a range of affect, normal reactions to life events gets constricted [00:07.00.00] in the case of traumatized children and they may learn to use dissociation at an early age when they can't escape from aversive stimulation in other ways, can't go away from a family environment that's abusive physically because they've got [00:07.20.00] no place else to go and are not able to live independently. So, how do they absent themselves from ongoing violence threat in the home? Well, one way to do that is to go away in your mind, develop cognitive strategies, psychobiologic strategies for dampening [00:07.40.00] emotional reactivity, particularly extreme fear, so that the child can continue to be in that threat situation and still survive. The consequence of that, though, may be that children learn inappropriate expression of those emotions or may not recognize milder emotions [00:08.00.00] at all. May be an on/off switch, it's either life threatening or it's not much to be bothered with. Well, you can tell this is my favorite. This is the trauma model or the ecopathologic perspective [00:08.20.00] that's less about what's going on internally and more about characteristics of the environments and important players in those environments in the child's life. There's two aspects of this model with respect to [00:08.40.00] increasing risk for violent behavior. The first is more indirect, that children who are exposed to trauma, the effects of that exposure interacts then with other ongoing psychosocial risk and resiliency factors and then may result in [00:09.00.00] increased risk for engaging in risk behaviors. And in the next



segment you're going to hear me talking about guns, gangs and gin, the three Gs that we need to remember in terms of dealing with at-risk adolescents. Guns, gangs and gin. Well, it's our perspective that if you develop [00:09.20.00] after surviving a traumatic experience or having a friend die or survive a traumatic experience, if you develop the idea that the world is not a safe place to be, that you do need to watch your back all the time, that can lead you to do other things. That can lead you to think that maybe you need some relief [00:09.40.00] to all this hypervigilance and marijuana is a good place to go. And there are plenty of friends in the case of our high-risk adolescents who are more than willing to supply the marijuana that can be used to dampen—take the edge off. I've heard many a child describe why they use marijuana [00:10.00.00] through the day is to take the edge off. It's to make those boring school classes tolerable. It's to dampen that worry that they may have about what they're going to find their parents doing when they get home and so on. So, that's one way it can lead people to engage in more risk behaviors. [00:10.20.00] The second is more direct, it can cause psychobiologic changes that directly increase risk for perceiving something as threatening and then responding in a violent way. An example of that would be hyperarousal, developing [00:10.40.00] hyperarousal in the context of surviving a life threatening experience that then leaves you with an alarm system you didn't have before, a proclivity to respond psychobiologically as though a similar event or experience is life threatening even when [00:11.00.00] it might not be. But you can see in the presence of these other risk factors how that could be deadly.

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